

Mirabeau B. Lamar

To a kid, one of the great advantages of being a Navy brat is that you change home ports from time to time – a life changing event you were powerless to accomplish on your own. Our final move brought the family to Houston my father to [Cameron Iron Works](#), and me to Mrs. Martin's Fifth Grade at [Roberts Elementary](#)

„ There I met some of my future Lamar classmates: **Letitia Kinzbach, Tony Ullrich, Tom Wise, Vanita Berson**... At her birthday party, Vanita's mother actually encouraged us to play [Spin The Bottle](#) – wow! this is living in the fast lane! I also learned some of the harsh realities of life: Tom told me when we double-dated to take Vanita and **Janet Junker** to the Village Theater that we boys were expected to pay for their tickets too – say *what*?

Then came [Pershing Junior High](#) – for three years I rode my bicycle (mostly on Bellaire Blvd) to get to school and home again. And I found that when you rode a school bus to a football game, you had an oh-so-mature cheerleader [**Marilu Ellis**] thanking you for riding her bus – could life possible get any better?

It could. It did. At [Mirabeau B. Lamar](#) Senior High School. Wow, I had made it into the big time. My twin sisters had blazed the trail for me, of course – and by senior year I was living large. I had “my” car – a Renault 4CV that **Jimmy Jennings, Eldon Jones, Rick Lilliott**, and others managed to put up on someone's porch during a party – and I had my first steady girlfriend: **Sally Clay** wore my class ring, yes, hanging on a chain around her neck – right up until the day she dumped me just two weeks before the Senior Prom. I somehow survived and came *this close* to getting a replacement date with my long-time crush, Letitia – but some snake had asked her out just the night before I called. Then miracle of miracles – I discovered **Puff** was available and she actually accepted my last minute plea.

Lamar was a continual amazement to me, where it seemed we inmates often were in charge of this marvelous asylum, with just a little choreography from **Mr. Keding** and **Mrs Denny**. What great teachers and fun classes – **Ms Gladys Pushard** for Math [with sliderules hanging from a belt loop: “Don't take your guns to town, son!”], **Ms Hollingsworth** for Chemistry, and of course the inimitable **Ms Greenwood's 5th Period Major Works**

English. [Travis](#) wrote his infamous essay on Robin Hood and the Arrow Shirt, and **Mike Hattwick** was continually due to report on *The Fall of the House of Usher* which I think he still hasn't read. Ms Greenwood would always end the class by saying, "Oh, you people have distracted me and we haven't accomplished anything!" And somehow we all got an A.

The Class of 1959 was everywhere doing everything. Especially on-stage. I sat in awe as I watched **Susan Ellis, Tommy Tune**, and (who? I couldn't get my eyes off of Susan in those tight black leotards...) perform this sultry sexy song and dance number, *Steam Heat*. And I listened in awe to the dulcet blend of [Jere Wicker](#), **Larry Hitt**, and **Pat Haragan** as they sang to [Tony Ullrich's](#) guitar ... songs about whiskey and women and hanging – wow, whiskey? – they gave a class face to a group I had only heard on the 45s: *The Kingston Trio*.

I walked home from Roberts Elementary to 2307 Gramercy Blvd almost every day with Tony Ulrich (photo from Roberts ES, below). Tony has a memory so much more complete than mine of these years:



"When my family moved to Houston from Dallas in June of 1949, our first home was at 2223 Dorrington, in the shadow of the [Shamrock Hilton Hotel](#). I began the 3rd grade at [Oran M. Roberts Elementary](#) on Greenbriar, then on to [John J. Pershing Jr. High](#). Some of you will remember Celeste Ullrich, my older sister, class of 1957. We had no TV, The home was not yet air-conditioned. I remember sleeping with the windows open, And I could hear the noise coming from the horse-racing track, the clickity clack of the railroad trains coming and going, and the car-racing noise from Playland Park. That was the music that put me to sleep at night.

"Mom and dad bought me a small AM radio, and I began listening to radio. My main memories there were of KLBS (which years later became [KILT](#)). KLBS was owned by one [Gordon McClendon](#), who called himself "the Old

Scotsman.” Because of KLBS, I began hearing old Houston Buff games called by Lowell Passe; the days of Vinegar Bend Mizell, Harry “the Hat” Walker and others. We went to many Houston Buff games, down off the Gulf Freeway. I got to see Baseball clown prince, [Max Patkin](#), at least 3-4 time over those quick, short years.

“Now, back to the music. One night (this was about 1953), I got curious about the other end of the radio dial. I turned down to the far right end, and discovered “the Blues.” I had discovered KYOK and KCOH. The DJ’S were totally different from what I had ever heard, but the music was just wonderful. I didn’t know it at the time, but those Years, on through the years in Lamar were the hey-day of blues stars like Muddy Waters, Little Junior Parker, Wille Mae “ Hound Dog” Thornton, Howlin’ Wolf, Jack Champion Dupree, Jimmy Reed, and all you reading this can add your favorites. The DJ’s all had funny names. “Zing Zang” Davis & Dizzy Lizzie, Daddy Deep-throat”, amongst others. I was enthralled. I had no interest in playing this genre, but I couldn’t take my ears off of it for years. So, all through Lamar, I was enjoying the pop stuff, but my main interest was the blues, until “*Tom Dooley*” hit the airwaves.

“*Tom Dooley*, the first smash-hit for [the Kingston Trio](#) was released in August, 1958, just as we were beginning our senior year. I was smitten. I didn’t know what that odd-sounding instrument was, but I knew I had to learn to play it. That odd- sounding instrument was the 5-string banjo, as played by the late [Dave Guard](#). (see my website: www.5stringbanjer.com



[m](#)). Well, I searched all over Houston for a 5-string banjo that I could afford, and I found one for \$35 at a pawn shop on Market Square. I took it to Red Novak at H&H Music, and he put it back to playing order for me, and I was on my way. I spent a lot of hours, during our senior year, trying to figure out what Dave Guard was doing. I just had to pick that banjo. And here I am, 50+ years later, still sitting in a small music studio, teaching folks to play that great sound of Bluegrass Style banjo.

Having come from Pershing Jr. High, my first experience with group singing was the mixed chorus, there, under the direction of Mrs. Virginia Perkins. I loved that class, that first time of singing with others, in an organized group. That love of group singing carried over to Lamar, and the mixed chorus under Mrs. Rosamund Glosup, a great lady, and a huge influence on my high school life. Most of my specific memories are faded, but I do count those class times as some of my happiest times in school. One memory that I'll never forget, and someone else might also remember; Mrs. Glosup had chosen a really hard piece, that I believe was titled; "Ho Spo Dee Po Milwee." Not sure what language that was, but it was difficult to perform. We practiced and we practiced The musical piece was accapella, and it modulated many times. Well, We performed it one time, in the Lamar auditorium, at some function (someone help me, here), and we got off, off-timing, off-key, off- everything. It was tough going, for what seemed eternity. Mrs. Glosup just stood there and pulled us along, and somehow, near the end, we got back on track and finished, on-key, together. Whew !!!! Mrs. Glosup was a great lady.

The Satellites



The Satellites, **Larry Hitt**, **Pat Haragan**, and [Jeremy Wicker](#), already an established group, asked me, I believe, to join them, with guitar, near the end of our junior year. We were all in the mixed chorus, and I felt very fortunate to be able to provide back-up for their vocal arrangements of the pop songs everyone loved to hear. As our senior year continued, we began singing some of the folk songs that were becoming so popular at that time. I had not yet begun using the banjo, so I believe all our performances that included me, included me on guitar, only. Larry's booming bass / baritone voice kept the vocals steady, and Pat and Jeremy's same voice range allowed them to trade off on upper parts. Believe me, all three could really sing, and their voices worked very, very well together. We spent part of one day. at our 40th reunion, singing and playing, and getting caught up on our lives, and we promised ourselves we would get together from time to time and play and sing. Thanks to The Satellites for letting me be part of the musical group.



Jere Wicker, Pat Haragan, and Larry Hitt harmonize while Tony Ullrich accompanies them on his guitar.

Thanks Larry, Pat and Jeremy. We'll all be interested to hear your individual memories of your history of the Satellites.

Gladys Pushard – senior year Calculus, first floor, windows facing the main parking lot. I made the mistake of qualifying for major works math class, differential & integral calculus our senior year. I remember being in awe of all who were in the class. **Wendel Mendel** was there, as was **Mike Hattwick, Jim Jennings, Kathleen Much, Jeremy Wicker, Mike Blackledge, Woody Tompkins** and a lot of the other truly bright kids in our class. I really struggled with those calculus classes. The bright side was the one of the two southern belles I had as teachers, Gladys Pushard. Mrs. P. was such a thoughtful, wonderful lady. She showed me helpful patience, and somehow I got through with B in differential, and an A- in integral.

Mrs. Huddleston – “Bonus nachos”..... “Uh! I mean buenos noches.” Junior year Spanish, second floor, windows facing the main parking lot. I include Mrs. Huddleston, because she really loved to teach. Spanish was her class, and she really loved to see the light come on her student's eyes. She was happy when we learned, and she showed it, in her words and actions. The term is “encouragement.”

Lee Keding – King of the white silk tie, the eclectic, the esoteric, the true meaning of “one-of-kind.” That’s our Lee Keding. Mr. Keding sponsored my club, Ramal, and we had fun, with him as our teacher / sponsor. The Choralettes went on a road trip, by bus, to perform at a function in Woodville, Texas. (you ladies can fill in here with your memories). Mr. Keding let me go along as moral support, and escort. All I remember is that my head was swimming the whole trip; all these beautiful girls and I got to go along for the trip. I never really got to know Mr. Keding, but he is truly a most “unforgettable character.”

It’s somewhat encouraging to know that I also figure prominently into the memoirs of some of my classmates. Wendell Mendell was one of our more accomplished scholars, who had a long and distinguished career at NASA after finding his way from Lamar to Cal Tech. Wendell recalls,

In my last semester of high school, I received a phone call one night from one of the popular girls, a unique event in my life. She invited me to a Beatnik Party the following weekend, apologizing for the somewhat late notice. I was bowled over by the honor and accepted immediately. I had to wear some kind of beatnik gear and, most importantly, I had to create a Work of Art to be exhibited at the party. During the week, **Mike Hattwick** told me that he had been invited but could not come because he had a job at a service station. Needing an equal number of each gender, the hostesses had decided to call me.

The party was given by three girls at the house of one of them. Everyone sat on the floor around a spread of dips and stuff. One of the hostesses came out of the kitchen after I arrived and noticed me. In a loud voice, she said, "Wendell Mendell! What are you doing here?" I immediately replied, "Hattwick couldn't come, so I am his substitute." After a flurry of consultation in the kitchen, I was assured that I was mistaken.

For my work of art, I had composed a massive poem of rhymed couplets, á la Alexander Pope. It was a narrative, and each stanza ended in a pun. I was rather proud of the monstrosity and read it with proper gusto and timing so that the terminal puns would have maximum effect. Sure enough, in the brief pause after each stanza, there were appreciative groans or laughs. Unfortunately, as I would begin the next stanza to build the pun, **Mike Blackledge** would interrupt me on the second line with a loud laugh, calling out "Oh, I get it!" My carefully constructed rhythm was decimated and I am sure no one remembers what could have been a monument to punnery.

At the end of the Fourth Grade in Indianapolis many years previously, my teacher brought me to the front of the class and told everyone I would be moving to Houston next school year and admonished me, “Don’t forget us!” I remember looking at her in shock: don’t forget you? Hey, these were my

buddies, my teacher – how could you even think I would forget you? Now I can't tell you a single name or another anecdote from Indiana – but I'll never forget the great folks and stories of the Lamar Class of 1959. (*Summer 2009*)